

THE GURU PHENOMENON:
INFLUENCE IN PAST AMERICAN CULTURE

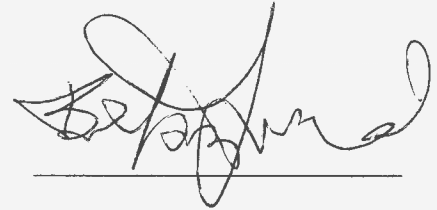
David Cyril Lapan

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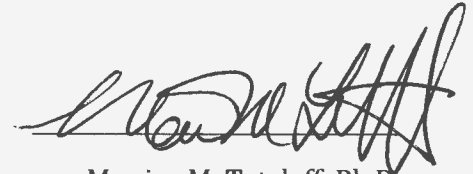
Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Liberal Studies.

MLS Committee:

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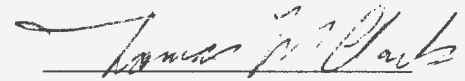
Betsy Lucal, Ph.D.

Director

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Monica M. Tetzlaff', written over a horizontal line.

Monica M. Tetzlaff, Ph.D.

Second Reader

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Thomas M. Clark', written over a horizontal line.

Thomas M. Clark, Ph.D.

Third Reader

Date of Oral Examination: May 8, 2017

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Dedication

Belief is both powerful and beautiful.
I dedicate this lively endeavor to my mother, Evelyn Lapan,
who never stopped believing in me;
and to my spiritual master, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada,
in whose teachings I will never stop believing.

Acknowledgements

I wish to extend my extreme gratitude to the Department of Veterans Affairs, for the financial assistance and the opportunity to gain new skills through my college degrees; and to Brooke Clevenger, my VA Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, who professionally assisted me and stood by me every step of the way.

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Abstract

The Guru Phenomenon: Influence in Past American Culture is a look into the influx of the Indian guru to the U.S. after the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. It encompasses the historical, cultural, social, and psychological aspects of this phenomenon. It includes my own personal experience as a Hare Krishna. What constitutes a true guru, as well as a false guru, as indicated in the scriptures, is explored. The benefits of following a true guru as well as the consequences of following a false guru are investigated.

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from India, Africa, and Asia. According to the U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, the intent of the act was "to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity" (Immigration). For the educated mind, this 1924 statement sounds like cloaked racism. While Vivekananda planted the seed, it was the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that officially compelled the United States, for the first time in history, to receive immigrants of all nationalities on a generally equal basis (Immigration). Within the influx of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent, the guru phenomenon began to germinate, bearing fruit into the early 1980s. The guru phenomenon was a global movement of Hindu spiritual masters. Following diverse currents, these gurus disseminated their philosophy beyond India. The gurus who came to light from within India's Hindu practices are prominent religious leaders who adapted their philosophies to specific periods, environments, and populations. They dispersed their spiritual views all over the world by linking Hindu fundamentals within their newly discovered American culture.

My thesis will take a close look at the beginnings and trace events that gave rise to these gurus throughout this period (1965 to the 1980s). For this project, I will provide the reasons why many Americans were drawn to seek out a guru, sometimes in droves, and convert to a very different, more exotic spirituality and accompanying philosophy. I will examine the historical events happening in the U. S. that may have steered its citizens in this direction. I desire to demonstrate that this phenomenon had positive effects in the United States, so I will draw on my own experiences of following a guru. I will refer to my own long-term, positive experience with the Hare Kṛṣṇa's, i.e. ISKCON (International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, incorporated in New York City, July

13th 1966), and my relationship with the ISKCON founder, Srila Prabhupada, through the experiences of my instructing gurus. Mukta kesa dasa and Chandrasekhar dasa, as well as my Spiritual Master, Danavir Goswami, whom I believe is a true and qualified guru authorized by Srila Prabhupada.

Chapter Overview

Here is what I cover in the coming chapters.

Chapter One – Following A Guru.

I will take a very personal look into my own journey of following my guru, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. It has been a journey traversing pain, struggle, and ultimately freedom, lasting 14 years thus far, and one I will continue to the end of this life, and beyond. This chapter will, also, look closely at the rise of ISKCON and Srila Prabhupada's attempt to sway the hearts and minds of a disenfranchised, disenchanted, and disillusioned American youth. He did this by teaching them an entirely new way to process information with ancient Vedic views within the culture of the Hare Kṛṣṇa. This chapter is meant to contrast the views of American thought with those of India.

Chapter Two – True Gurus

This chapter will cover the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava (Hare Kṛṣṇa) scriptural view of a true guru as well as the oral *parampara* system of disciplic succession and the ancient wisdom these 32 great Acaryas have passed down for the past 5500 years regarding the

nature of true gurus. I will pass them on as they were passed down orally to me from my spiritual master.

Chapter Three – Falling Down and the Damaging Fallout – False Gurus

This chapter will focus on Reverend Jim Jones, the spiritual leader of the Peoples Temple and their failed attempt as a new religious movement (NRM) due to Jones' inability to function as a successful home-grown western guru.

Chapter Four – A Defunct Movement?

Many people wonder if the Hare Kṛṣṇas still exist. Although not seen much anymore at airports unless they are traveling, the big cities of America are still alive with congregational chanting (sankirtan) and street festivals. Yes, they are a somewhat low key movement now and there have been some serious growing pains, as discussed in the chapter.

Let us now begin with the story of my own personal, and many times sublime, journey into Kṛṣṇa Consciousness...and my first experiences with my guru.

Chapter One – Following a Guru

I begin with reflection on Blaise Pascal and some of my favorite spiritual quotes:

Part I – My Journey

“All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.”

— Blaise Pascal,
Pensées

Blaise Pascal, the articulately inspired fellow of Descartes, lived his days as an extraordinary mathematician and physicist, but it is his uncompleted apologia for the Christian religion upon which his standing now lies. The *Penseés* is a compilation of philosophical pieces, notes, and theses in which Pascal surveys the conflicts of human nature in terms of psychological, social, conjectural and – most importantly - theological requisites. Humankind materializes from Pascal's inquiry as an abject and forsaken living thing surrounded by a detached cosmos, but who is capable of being transfigured through faith in the grace of God.

The above quote from Pascal quickly reminded me of a few others:

Be still, and know that I *am* God.

– King James Bible

To realize the Self is to be still.

– Ramana Maharshi

Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness.

– Meister Eckhart

If one had the ability to sit quietly in a room alone, what would be the outcome?

Pascal appears to suggest *something* must occur to improve humanity's problems. But what? God's message also seems to indicate there is something to the act of *being still* or *sitting quietly* – alone. These messages are connected.

I discovered, the hard way, these two, intertwined, extraordinary truths. Finally gaining, by God's grace, the ability to sit quietly in an eight by twelve foot room – and experience the blessing of being filled by God's presence.

To begin, I was, literally, a captive audience. Prison, unimaginably, had become my life's greatest blessing. I had all the time in the world to explore this gift – it became an incredible journey of self-discovery and self-realization. However, it did not come all at once, and it was not without first experiencing violence and great hardship that I finally become at peace within and was able to still a restless, and sometimes turbulent, mind. I will not delve into the grisly details of the prison experience; this is another story for another paper, perhaps. Rather, I will dive into the topic of my thesis, with a recounting of my own story of coming to consciousness.

Sidebar

Let me tell you a story. This story is my own, written before attending college was even a possibility, or a dream for that matter – and at the behest of my own instructing guru, Chandrasekhar dasa, who was also in charge of the ISKCON prison ministry at the time. At this time, Srila Prabhupada’s teachings had already saved my life, so I was happy to comply. It was the first time I was inspired to write in twelve years, and the reason was to pay it forward:

How I Came to Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Hare Kṛṣṇa! Please accept my humble obeisances.
All glories to Srila Prabhupada. He lives forever!

Although I did not fully realize it at the time, the seeds of Kṛṣṇa consciousness were planted in my teens with the advent of Srila Prabhupada to the West and the appearance of the popular song “My Sweet Lord” by George Harrison which incorporated the maha-mantra into the lyrics. This sparked the awakening of my dormant love for Kṛṣṇa, if ever so slowly - as I still had no real understanding to the meaning of the maha-mantra or the Holy Names of the Lord. All I knew was the song made me feel happy, especially when I sang the song myself.

My awakening of love for Kṛṣṇa did not come full bloom until many years later – and only after falling into nescience, hitting rock-bottom, committing my criminal offense and being sentenced to prison. In all truth, I see my incarceration as a blessing and the Lord’s infinite mercy, as the experience has brought me into the light and to the lotus feet of Sri Kṛṣṇa.

Take it from me, the old adage is true; “Once you hit rock-bottom, the only direction you can look is up!” I looked up, expecting to see an angry and wrathful God condemning me and my actions – what I saw instead was a God of Love; full of compassion, understanding, mercy and forgiveness. “Surrender unto Me”, He seemed to be saying. “Who is He?” I wondered.

What’s more, I felt fully attracted to this Benevolent Being and somehow knew it was my spiritual duty to

Kṛṣṇa, Himself. For me, it was and continues to be the experience of my lifetime, hence, its importance to convey in my thesis. I assert that my guru, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is verily a true guru. He steadfastly adheres to all the scriptural qualifications indicated in the following chapter, *True Gurus*, as well as requiring his followers to fulfill their obligations as required. To this end, Srila Prabhupada is forever the teacher of his disciples. While his voice might be a little edgy and chiding, it is still gentle and full of love. Of the disciple Srila Prabhupada writes, “. . . a disciple cannot disobey the order of his spiritual master. That is the relationship between a disciple and his master.” He gives the example of Arjuna who surrendered to Kṛṣṇa “without any vanity regarding his own erudition, and without any reservation” (Satsvarupa).

Although he has transcended to Lord Kṛṣṇa’s spiritual abode, he lives forever in his voluminous books, tapes, music, and videos. He continues to preach and teach his message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to a whole new generation of devotees young and old, including me.

Before proceeding into ISKCON’s rise, it is important to understand the four phases of the guru phenomenon in the west as analyzed by sociologist, John Heron, which will give insight into the progression of the guru movement prior to the sixties (when the phenomenon was at its peak) and the decline of the present day – as well as a look into the possible future.

The Four Phases of the Guru Phenomenon in the West

The following very insightful observations by John Heron, a well-known English sociologist, presents an excellent overview of the history and evolution of the guru phenomenon in the West and in popular consciousness.

“There seems to be four phases in the guru phenomenon in the West,” he states (1). He first mentions the arrival of Swami Vivekananda from India during the first Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition (World's Fair) in Chicago, where “there was just a small guru-invasion from the East with key players like Vivekananda and the spread of the Vedanta movement in the West” (Heron 1). Secondly, there was the “major guru-invasion from the East including the dramatic spread through the 60s and the 70s,” (Heron 1), as discussed in the Introduction. The third phase took place along the same lines as the second with “the growing phenomenon of homegrown Western gurus and spiritual teachers claiming the special status of 'enlightenment'” (Heron 1), such as the Reverend Jim Jones. The fourth phase, he states, is just beginning and can be distinguished by four features:

- The erosion of guru status as a result of sexual and financial abuse.
- The erosion of 'enlightenment' claims by the proliferation of the number of people, especially in the West, making the claim.
- A growing awareness that spiritual authority is within
- The emergence of peer to peer spirituality, which democratizes charismatic, enlightened leadership. (Heron 1)

Along with the preceding knowledge now understood, a look into the probably most successful organization (ISKCON) and their guru (A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) is presented.

Part II - The Rise of ISKCON 1965 to the 1980s

Even though the origins of ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) echo back almost 600 years to the pastimes of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu in India, it is [or was] “considered a new religious movement (NRM) by arbitrary definition only – because it was first introduced in western countries in the middle 1960s” (Baird 157). A new religious movement (NRM), according to James Beckford, a British sociologist of religion, is a comprehensive term used to identify religious, ethical, and spiritual groups, communities and practices of relatively modern origins. NRMs may be novel in origin or they may exist on the fringes of a wider religion, in which case they will be distinct from pre-existing denominations (29).

However, new religions have often faced a hostile reception from established religious organizations and various secular institutions. In Western nations, a secular anti-cult movement and a Christian countercult movement arose during the 1970s and 1980s to oppose emergent groups. According to sociologist of religion, David V. Barrett, ever since the early 2000s, in order to stay away from the derogatory undertones of labels such as “cult” and “sect,” most sociologists of religion use the phrase “new religious movement” (24). Prior to this date, the term “cult” was widely understood as meaning a fake religion that brainwashes and abuses its members, steals their life saving, and then

convinces them to commit suicide (Barrett). Due to this designation of “cult” used by ISKCON detractors, this newly introduced eastern religion prompted antagonistic reactions on the part of several sectors of the American public. American society’s reaction to New Religious Movements has almost always been hostile, within varying degrees of intensity. This is especially true when the religion arrives from foreign shores. (Clark 43). Therefore, it is my opinion that the term NRM is used to delegitimize a new religion, as if it were a fad, or worse, a cult.

For that reason, historically, a new religion from overseas, particularly Asia, has been treated by U. S. society with skepticism, contempt, and even considerable incidents of persecution (Barrett 43). It is for these reasons that Srila Prabhupada wanted to separate his movement from the definition of being designated a new religion and delineate ISKCON as an established ancient religion. Looking at the situation from the point of an anthropologist, the concept of a Revitalization Movement might be more beneficial. Anthropologist, Anthony F. C. Wallace, argues: “A revitalization movement is defined as a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture.” From a cultural position, a revitalization movement is an exceptional type of change phenomenon. Whether perceived correctly or not, people occupied in the revitalization process need to view their culture as a type of system (265). Additionally, the people guiding the movement are of the opinion that the present cultural system is not satisfactory for their needs and emotional well-being; and they must revolutionize, not just isolated, internal matters, but an entirely fresh cultural organization. They must, also, postulate new associations and new characteristics as well.

In 1965, on the heels of congressional changes with respect to immigration, Srila Prabhupada carried his teachings, and one box of scripture he had translated into English, to an unsuspecting New York City populace. New York University research anthropologist Charles R. Brooks commented in his lecture *Understanding ISKCON* delivered at a conference at Humbolt University, Berlin in July 1995:

This was the situation in the late sixties and early seventies when a counterculture formed in the United States and Western Europe. Such conditions are optimal for the formation of revitalization movements, and they may or may not succeed depending on whether a charismatic leader or prophet appears. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami arrived in the United States at this time, although he was personally unaware of these conditions. He thus provided the charismatic leadership and direction around which a new culture and society - ISKCON - formed. (Brooks 3)

By this time in his life he was seventy years old, following the instruction of his own spiritual master to preach Krsna consciousness in every town and villiage. By the grace of Lord Krsna he was determined to change the world, one person at a time, if need be . . . and soon his preaching attracted a small army of Hare Krsna devotees, willing to expand Gaudiya Vaisnavism (the official name of the Hare Krsna tradition) in America.

The simple and non-materialistic lifestyle of the Hare Krsnas, as they were soon called due to their chanting of the *maha mantra*, were a defiance to American social ideals. Their style of dress, combined with the four regulative principles taught by Srila Prabhupada according to Vaisnava scripture, were, in many ways, attractive to the youth

of the period whose way of thinking ran counter to the establishment of “the Man,” in which their parents belonged and prospered. This attraction, however, did not sit well with many parents of these college-aged adult children, and many of these parents had the monetary means to strike back at ISKCON.

One of the arguments aimed toward ISKCON disciples was that since they were not a *bona fide* religion, they were not permitted to First Amendment protection rights; thus, they should be considered an illegitimate “cult” (Baird 158). With the sole objective of forcing them to repudiate their newly realized devotion to Lord Krsna, and return them to their families, kidnapped adult Hare Krsna devotees were frequently exposed to the psychological and corporal cruelty of deprogrammers and over-reaching law officers.

This tactic, however, backfired against these deprogrammers and well-intentioned, but scheming, parents, giving Srila Prabhupada and his new Krsna devotees all the ammunition they needed, and they used it effectively through the New York Supreme Court. This famous court case, which began in a Queens County, New York Grand Jury, had an explicit bearing on the struggle by ISKCON to be painted as a *bona fide* religion. The case was initiated by the New York Temple of ISKCON due to the kidnapping of Merylee Kreshower (aged 24) and Ed Shapiro (aged 22). Both devotees had been living in the New York Temple at the time of the kidnapping by deprogrammers – and Kreshower’s mother, who had arranged the caper (Baird 158). Shapiro’s father had him committed to a mental institution, but he was found devoid of any psychological issues.

The deprogramming apparently failed. When Kreshower was released, she promptly filed charges against the detective who had arranged the kidnapping, as well as

her own mother. The case was heard before the Grand Jury in Queens, New York which, made inquiries into the teachings and practices of ISKCON rather than pursue the kidnapping situation (Baird 158). This investigation led to the arrests of the kidnappers, and a public admonishment of the parents for interfering with the lives of their adult children.

On March 17, 1977, the New York Supreme Court declared that, “The Hare Krishna movement is a bona fide religion with roots in India, that go back thousands of years” (*New York Law Journal*, 21 March 1977, 12, col. 4). The court also affirmed that “the entire and basic issue before this court is whether or not the two alleged victims in this case and the defendants, will be allowed to practice the religion of their choice . . . and this must be answered with a resounding affirmation” (*New York Law Journal*, 21 March 1977, 13, col. 4).

In a noteworthy effort to solidify the court’s decision that ISKCON is a bona fide religion, the Hare Kṛṣṇas sent envoys to the 1976 conference of the American Academy of Religions, Society for Biblical Literature and American School of Oriental Research in St. Louis (Baird 159). There they procured the names of nearly 200 academics on an entreaty which confirmed that ISKCON was a *bona fide* religion and ought to be provided freedom under the First Amendment. In a succession of bulletins sent to scholars subsequent to the conference in St. Louis, spokespersons from ISKCON expressed gratitude to those intellectuals who had had an impact on the conclusion of the Kreshower/Shapiro case.

Later, in order to counter ISKCON’s success in the courts, a significant number of bills came into play by the state legislatures of Massachusetts, Vermont, Pennsylvania,

Texas, and Florida which would have permitted an individual to secure power and control over anybody they considered to be involved in a 'cult,' and confine that member for one calendar month while they were undergoing deprogramming . It was only due to a vibrantly robust entreaty by American academics, who were sympathetic to ISKCON's cause as well as other new eastern religious philosophies, that those bills failed to become law. The bills were viewed as unconstitutional because they required a religious test for an spiritual organization to be considered a true faith. Due to this requirement, it was believed these states would have lost in federal court, as the U. S. Constitution allows no such religious tests. However, it is important to remember that it was first the New York Supreme Court which resolved the disputed case of whether ISKCON was a true religion and permitted by right to shelter under the umbrella of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. It was Srila Prabhupada who paved the way for the future religious rights of numerous individuals in American society, rights that, until this period, many believed were reserved only to the major religions.

Here is another instance where ISKCON and Srila Prabhupada made a major impact on American culture. It was influential in defining deprogramming as a form of kidnapping, therefore illegal in the eyes of the law, and a violation of a person's individual rights under the First Amendment. It also affirmed that a person could practice the religion of their choosing without interference from outside influences.

In the next segment, I address the following question: As a true guru, how did Srila Prabhupada approach the suffering he encountered in the struggles of America's youth? First, he observed and listened...he won their hearts and minds. Then he won their love.

Winning the Hearts and Minds of Young America

“Winning of hearts and minds” is a term that has crept into today’s lexicon politically, culturally, and psychologically in the U. S.; especially when it comes to decades of terrorism, over a decade of war, and an influx of new immigrants and worn-torn refugees. Srila Prabhupada, in his infinite wisdom, realized, over a half century ago, that hearts and minds could be won over by a cultural conquest of preaching love; not so much on a material level, although he did this, too, but more so on a spiritual level. This he felt was the way to heal the damaged hearts and minds of the youth of America who had become greatly disenchanted by the America they had inherited from the previous generation which included their parents, the government, and big corporations, i.e. “the Man.”

Cultural Thought and the Heart of Music

Growing up in the seventies, I remember how important the music of the era was to my friends and me. A new song with a strong cultural message was like finding gold, and was discussed and debated thoroughly, many times during our classes to the frustration of our teachers. Today, whenever I hear a specific song from my youth, I have strong memories and emotions, including where I was and who I was with when I first heard the song, as well as how it made me feel.

The music of the period reflected distrust of the government and the emergence of the mid-sixties counterculture which extended well into the Vietnam era and beyond.

Music of this generation was extremely important as it reflected the hearts and minds of a young population frustrated and left out of political discourse. Music was not just “music”; it was not the former generations’ do-wop-ditty-bop music of the era. It was *the* social media of the times. There were no cell phones, computers, or internet. There was barely even FM radio; I was there, and remember the flaws of FM radio while cruising in my Olds 442. It was the way of getting the message of America’s youth to the ears of the Man. Here, the protest song made its debut.

Arlo Guthrie, famous for his lengthy war protest song, “Alice’s Restaurant,” which runs over 18 minutes, proudly and jokingly proclaimed in his concerts that it was *this* song President Nixon was listening to, and then erased, from his secret office tapes during the Watergate era. The time of the missing Nixon tape, just over 18 minutes!

The following are just a few of the more popular and poignant songs written and released by the rising countercultural generation:

Eve of Destruction – Barry McGuire – 1965

"Eve of Destruction" is a Vietnam War protest song penned by P. F. Sloan in mid-1964. Although numerous artists have recorded this song, the most popular recording was by raspy-voiced virtuoso, Barry McGuire. This recording was created between July 12 and July 15, 1965 and released by Dunhill Records. Excerpts include:

The eastern world, it is explodin',
 Violence flarin', bullets loadin',
 You're old enough to kill but not for votin',

You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin',
 And even the Jordan river has bodies floatin',
 But you tell me over and over and over again my friend,
 Ah, you don't believe we're on the eve of destruction.

Protests of the Vietnam War were not the only battle lines portrayed in musicians' songs in the United States. There were other perceived heavy-handed restrictions of movement by authorities which inspired some artists to write and sing.

For What It's Worth – Buffalo Springfield – 1966

"For What It's Worth" is a song composed by Stephen Stills. It was performed on stage by Buffalo Springfield, recorded on December 5, 1966, and finally released as a single on Atco Records in January 1967. Although "For What It's Worth" is frequently viewed as an anti-war song; however, Stephen Stills was motivated to write the piece due to the Sunset Strip (in Los Angeles) police imposed curfew due to riots on the strip in November of 1966. The incident began during the early stages of the counterculture era of the mid-sixties. Here is a sample of the verse and the coming mindset of the times:

There's battle lines being drawn
 Nobody's right if everybody's wrong
 Young people speaking their minds
 Getting so much resistance from behind

Paranoia strikes deep
Into your life it will creep
It starts when you're always afraid
You step out of line, the Man come and take you away

Protesting students at colleges throughout the country finally came to a tragic head when President Nixon sent the National Guard to Kent State University in Ohio to ensure peaceful protests – but somehow the troops started firing into the crowd of unarmed students, killing four.

Kent State Massacre/Neil Young – *Ohio* – Atlantic

"Ohio" is a protest song and counterculture anthem composed and performed by the great Neil Young in reaction to the Kent State shootings of May 4, 1970, by National Guard troops. It was also performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young:

Tin soldiers and Nixon coming,
We're finally on our own.
This summer I hear the drumming,
Four dead in Ohio.

As Srila Prabhupada continued to preach non-violence in light of the songs of America's youth, he could hear those voices the government ignored. He knew that their

hearts and minds needed to hear a new message, a message from a new and different perspective, a message from an ancient culture and conquest of hearts and minds.

Hearts and Minds within the Summer of Love:

A Story of Disciples

“When I was Prabhupada’s personal secretary . . . , he introduced the phrase ‘cultural conquest.’ He told me dozens of times during this period that this is the way to preach in America . . . ‘I’ve always been convinced that this will make America the first Krishna conscious country,’ ” (Rameshvara 19), Prabhupada would say to this particular personal secretary, Rameshvara. Another devotee recalls, “I realized for the first time how the philosophy the swami was teaching was not just a philosophy but was a culture. Krishna consciousness was not just the ideas of one person – the swami – but was something greater; it wasn’t just about God and the spiritual world. It was a way of life that was embraced by an entire civilization” (Mukunda 116-117).

Spring 1967 was the dawning of the Summer of Love. In the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, new residents of the area had already begun to migrate to the California city, the hippy culture was arriving like there was another gold rush. Unusually garbed youth in their early stages of adulthood loitered in the streets and in entryways. “Haight-Ashbury was the multicolored underside of the ‘American Dream.’ Some of these young men and women were dropouts from college as well as high-school. Some were well educated students from wealthy, privileged families. However, all were seeking an unconventional way of life that characterized their version of the dream...”

(Mukunda 1-2). The undertaking of challenging social norms was the model in the Haight-Ashbury district. Early adults there supported a viewpoint that disdained capitalism, US military involvement in Vietnam, Christian-based religions, government power, and, most of all, conformism. Some young Americans, who had already received their draft cards, ripped them up or scorched their cards in non-violent, public protests. They also did this to other forms of identification as well, in order to assure total anonymity in an attempt to attain an alternative cultural lifestyle, and hoping to make it impossible to be found by well-intentioned family members or authorities wanting to ship them off to war (Mukunda 1-2).

One Hare Kṛṣṇa disciple, waiting and hoping for the world to change, put these events and feelings of the time into words:

My friends, graduate students mostly, were undergoing some intense value changes. The world seemed too volatile for us to follow in the footsteps of our parents by dedicating ourselves to lifetime careers, or investing in families and expensive homes. Wanting to get at the meaning of things, we began searching, reading mystic poets and investigating scriptures. We studied the Buddhist Sutras, Plato, Zen, St. Augustine, the Hindus. We were on the trail of something, but what? Whenever we tried to explain it, we would have to resort to hackneyed definitions. Something earth-shattering was happening, surely. Was this the Aquarian Age emerging? Or did every generation experience the same thing in a different way? ... Clearly, what we needed was a guru. (Hayagriva 11)

Thus the seed was planted in the mind of Hayagriva and, likewise, in the minds of many young Americans searching for meaning in a chaotic world; and the guru, in this case Srila Prabhupada, had come as promised in the sastras. For many new disciples to the movement, it was a way to revisit the spiritual values their parents held – but for which they had spurned. Unfortunately, their parents rarely accepted their new found spirituality, and subsequent conversion into a new faith. Most parents could not get beyond the Hare Krishna dress and hair style in order to accept what was truly developing in the hearts and minds of their adult children (Clarke 65). Additionally, as previously mentioned, many young Americans just wanted a fresh start in life outside of influences they felt were stifling. In his research, Peter Clark further observed that most of his “informants” emphasized the “developmental nature of conversion, they saw it as a new start, a new beginning, a rebirth” (65). These disciples were very attracted to a new way of thinking; different from their parents, different from how they were taught in schools and colleges, different from mainstream religions and different from society in general. Charles R. Brooks, a research anthropologist, argued that as this condition is experienced by an increased amount of disciples “a period of 'cultural distortion' can be said to exist.” When it is realized that the same problems and needs are shared between members, sense of community and unity between begins to grow (3). In other ways, also, their new guru introduced Vedic views.

Srila Prabhupada frequently held intellectual discussions on the topics of the day regarding the diversity of Vedic thought. For instance, he designated Kṛṣṇa consciousness as science, the science of returning home to God. He would give his disciples detailed instructions on how to live to reach Lord Kṛṣṇa’s abode after they left

their material bodies. He would teach his disciples and devotees, many attending colleges and universities, that there is not just the Western view of the world but, also, a much more ancient view. Here, a contrasting look into a Western view as juxtaposed against the Vedic view of Eastern thought which is very attractive to new disciples.

The following discourse is not an argument but rather a comparison of a Western view and the Vedic counterpart. It is an important example of one of the teachings of Srila Prabhupada's lectures, many times transmitted time and again so the devotee can recite it by heart. This is one of our most important teachings, the difference between material evolution and spiritual evolution. From Srila Prabhupada's lips, to my instructing guru's ears, and from his lips to my ears, I now recite it to you:

The Hindu Theory of Evolution versus the Darwinian Theory of Evolution

The Hindu theory of evolution is vastly dissimilar from the scientific theory of evolution although it is thought to be closer to truth when contrasted to the scientific theory of evolution, according to Srila Prabhupada. While scientists have confidence in the evolution of the materialistic form (composed of the five earth elements), Hindus believe in the evolution of souls that progress through 8,400,000 births and death to lastly take birth in human form. A soul that took a human form in this life may again be born as some of the other 8.4 million species in the subsequent life dependent on its yearnings or past actions. It is important to note that only the human soul can go back home to God. This progression is termed the "Transmigration of Souls."

The Transmigration of Souls concerns the boundless journey of a soul from numerous materialistic forms to bear out the fruits of its karma. A soul is born over and over throughout various species to make every effort for a human birth with the final goal of moksha (salvation). A spirit soul within each entity departs the lifeless body and receives a newborn body in harmony with their aspirations and previous endeavors. So if one enjoys eating meat and bellowing at people like a dog, then one might turn out to be a *kutta* (dog) in one's ensuing life. Why? Because one craved to exist as a dog and the compassionate merciful Lord Kṛṣṇa will satisfy one's wishes in the following birth...Or if you are a God-conscious person you will achieve moksha, and go back home to live with the Lord – never to be reborn again.

Juxtaposed against Darwin's theory, Vedic theory has one additional fundamental distinction. The Vedic theory of soul evolution is relevant only to a specific being and not to the whole species. Each soul autonomously determines its evolutionary characteristics in the next lifecycle.

Thus measured up to the Darwin model of materialistic evolution, the Hindu model of evolution is accentuated by the spiritual and psychological evolution of life on earth. Srila Prabhupada reasons that unless the human race quickly comes to a position of self-realization, they will be overwhelmed no matter what they try to accomplish in ways of progress, and, in fact, it is already happening. For example, modern society is unable to even keep the peace within its borders – there is fighting individually, religiously, socially, politically, and nationally. Despite the growth of knowledge, nations are exhibiting the mentality of lower animal societies (Prabhupada *Science* 200).

In summary, this section is meant to compare and contrast the nature of Western thought to Eastern thought. It is meant to be an exchange of information and ideas, and to present a sampling of what Srila Prabhupada offered to his disciples as an alternative to the cultural norms of the era. Teachings like these are important because these teachings are what attracted young Americans to their new guru, Srila Prabhupada. It is a God-conscious realization that fills a void of the heart; the void of belonging and community, a community of many souls who believe as one.

These are just a few example of Vedic thought. There are literally thousands of examples in Srila Prabhupada's books and the *sastras*. Most are freely available through the Hare Kṛṣṇas who generously share Prabhupada's teachings to the world but predominantly to his devotees who still yearn for alternate thought in a cookie-cutter world.

If there is one thing I have learned about Srila Prabhupada, he never backed down from a fight, whether for the civil rights of a devotee, or the organizational right of ISKCON. I have read of his successes from around the world; he had a brilliant and beautiful mind. He was, indeed, an incredible leader, and a true guru in every sense. We will now consider his characteristics as a true guru.

Chapter Two – True Gurus

Before considering true gurus, it may be important to first understand the importance of certain words and the possible repercussions of manipulating them for other than principled reasons. Let's begin with Hitler.

What's in a Word?

Before Hitler and the Nazis hijacked the ancient *swastika* symbol and used it for their agenda of hate and annihilation, this auspicious Hindu word meaning “good fortune” or “well-being” was frequently and widely used in America and Europe in the beginning of the twentieth century on greeting cards for celebrating weddings, a baby's birth, Christmas, New Year's Day, etc. The swastika has an extensive history. It was used at least 5,000 years before Adolf Hitler designed his Nazi flag, citing it as the symbol for the Aryan race. The Hindu Demi-God, Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is adorned with the swastika on his palm. In reality, the word *swastika* comes from the Sanskrit *svastika*. It became popular after the visit of India's Swami Vivekananda to the World's Fair and the Parliament of World Religions Exhibit in Chicago in 1893. Hitler had an affinity for religious symbols and artifacts, thinking they would somehow bring him power. Today, in America, the swastika is associated with skinheads and white supremacists. In prisons throughout the America, it is a symbol of the Aryan Brotherhood, a vicious and brutal gang promoting hatred and violence. Thanks to Hitler, would you ever send a greeting card with a swastika to a loved one today on a day of auspiciousness? Words and their improper use have consequences.

knowledge, an exemplar in life, an inspirational source and who reveals the meaning of life" (Mlecko 43). So, who is the true guru, and what is his constitutional nature?

The True Guru

Who is the true guru? The answer is found in the sacred texts. According to verses in the Hindu and Vaishnava *sastras* (*Sanskrit* for “sacred texts or teachings”), which include, but are not limited to, the voluminous *Vedas*, *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, and imparted by the Hindu Sampradaya (translated as “tradition” or a “religious system”) and disseminated by Sanatana Dharma (in Hinduism, a Sanskrit term used to indicate the “eternal” or absolute array of duties or religiously ordained practices incumbent upon all Hindus, irrespective of class, caste, or sect) through the oral parampara system of disciplic succession. These 32 Acaryas – the topmost members of the Sampradaya's disciplic succession – are referred to categorically as the Sampradaya Acaryas. So, to be clear: “ISKCON adheres to the traditional system of paramparā, or disciplic succession, in which teachings upheld by scriptures are handed down from master to disciple, generation after generation” (Jayadvaita 1).

In the *Bhagavad-Gita as It Is*, the list of disciplic succession is presented as follows: “*Evam parampara-praptam imam rajarsayo viduh* (Bhagavad-Gita 4.2): Kṛṣṇa, Brahma, Narada, Vyasa, Madhva, Padmanabha, Nṛhari, Madhava, Aksobhya, Jaya Tirtha, Jnanasindhu, Dayanidhi, Vidyanidhi, Rajendra, Jayadharma, Purusottama, Brahmanya Tirtha, Vyasa Tirtha, Laksmipati, Madhavendra Puri, Isvara Puri (Nityananda, Advaita), Lord Caitanya, Rupa (Svarupa, Sanatana), Raghunatha, Jiva, Kṛṣṇadasa, Narottama, Visvanatha, (Baladeva) Jagannatha, Bhaktivinoda, Gaurakisora,

Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada"
(Rocana dasa I).

A true guru will never ask his disciple, and devotee of the Lord, to do *anything* he would not do himself. He leads by example. For example, Hare Kṛṣṇa guru, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, leading by example, would frequently cook, in just his dhoti, for his new disciples when they overslept! A dhoti is a garment sported by male Hindus, comprising a piece of cloth tied around the waist and covering the upper legs. He would do this even after being up all night translating his books into English for their benefit. His thinking was clear. His devotees would feel so bad afterwards, especially after witnessing spatter burns from the hot ghee on the skin of his chest and arms, they would never oversleep again! In the beginning, this would happen often in many of the new temples he visited.

Continuing, true gurus will never ask for money, or anything “material,” in exchange for his wisdom, teachings, or spiritual blessings. This includes eventual initiation, if the disciple requests. True gurus do not live in opulence, nor is he desirous of possessions. He may request his own small space in order to have the solitude and quietness to meditate and write. True guru follows the four regulative principles, *ahimsa* (non-violence), and chants his rounds daily. True gurus accept the sins (*karma*) of his disciples onto himself. He does this so his disciple might have a fresh start in devotion to the Lord. A true guru follows the instruction of his guru, which remains “as it is” for his own disciples. This means a guru’s guru follows the instruction of his own guru – and these instructions trace all the way back in disciplic succession to Lord Kṛṣṇa’s teaching to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra of the *Bhagavad Gita* (*Song of the Lord*)

scriptural oratory. The *bona fide*, or true, guru will simply present what the Supreme Guru, God, says in *bona fide*, or revealed, scripture. A true guru cannot, and *will not*, change the message of the disciplic succession.

In reciprocation, true gurus do request that disciples follow the four regulative principles of *dharma* (or way to live): First, no gambling; second, no drugs or intoxicants; third, no illicit sex; and fourth, no eating of meat, fish, or eggs. The guru also requests the dedicated disciple to chant 16 rounds, of 108 beads, on his guru-provided *japa mala* (chanting garland) daily. The greatest chant is called the *mahamantra* (the great hymn of salvation). It is comprised of the holy names of the Lord:

hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa/kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare

hare rama hare rama/rama rama hare hare

The *mahamantra* is considered to be the supreme mantra as it asks God to kindly engage the chanting devotee in His service. It loosely translates, “Oh Lord,” (kṛṣṇa/rama) “Oh energy of the Lord,” (hare) “Please engage me in Your service.” Here the holy names of Kṛṣṇa and Rama designate the masculine external energy of God, and the holy name Hare signifies the even more powerful internal energy, which is the divine feminine. Hare is another name for Radha, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s eternal love.

Further explained by Hayagriva, the Sanskrit word, *Mantra*, can be further broken down into two smaller words, *Man* meaning ‘mind,’ and *tra* meaning ‘delivered.’ These Vedic mantras, also referred to as hymns, help to deliver the devotee from the mind’s fabrications and fantasies which may cause distress in present day to day circumstances,

directing the disciple away from God consciousness. The mind is considered to be intelligence, and beyond this intelligence is one's soul (91). So, the mantra frees the devotee's mind from the material level, strengthens the devotee's intelligence, and leads to the spiritual plane, or God Consciousness, as believed by Hare Kṛṣṇa disciples.

Additionally, the guru requests his disciples to follow *ahimsa* (or non-violence) toward all living beings, including oneself. The disciple is allowed to defend himself and protect his family. The guru asks that his disciples practice some type of service (or *seva*) daily. This is service done in the name of the Lord. It can include some personal service to the guru (i.e. secretarial, cooking, etc.), service to other devotees, service in the temple, or *sankirtan* (dancing and singing outside the temple), just to name a few. These are simple, yet conservative, instructions, performed in devotion to Kṛṣṇa and dedication to Guru (or Spiritual Master). However, faithfully following these instructions requires a strong will and great devotion, which only the guru can provide by the grace granted to him by his own service to the Lord. The spiritual rewards are beyond human comprehension. Srila Prabhupada would never pressure anyone to follow his instruction but would always request that a seeker of a true guru make an informed decision: "A devotee should have intelligence to know who is deviating. Surrender by your intelligence but don't surrender your intelligence." (Srila Prabhupada, letter to Bali Mardana, 1974)

The ensuing three Natures (or types) of Gurus are all authorized by the scriptures:

- Diksa Guru – is the initiating spiritual master who gives Diksa (or initiation).
- Siksa Guru – is the instructing spiritual master who reveals transcendental knowledge to the disciple.

- Caitya Guru – is the *Paramatma* (or Supersoul) who imparts knowledge from within the devotee as verified in the scriptures: “To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me” (Bhagavad Gītā 10.10).

Scriptural references regarding the nature of the guru are demonstrated below:

“One should know the instructing spiritual master to be the Personality of Kṛṣṇa. Lord Kṛṣṇa manifests Himself as the Supersoul and as the greatest devotee of the Lord” (Caitanya-caritamṛta Ādi 1.47). Srila Prabhupada further explains in his purport (the meaning or substance) of this scriptural passage, “There is no difference between the shelter-giving Supreme Lord and the initiating and instructing spiritual masters. If one foolishly discriminates between them, he commits an offense in the discharge of devotional service” (Caitanya-caritamṛta Ādi.1.47. Purport by Srila Prabhupada).

Further on in this scripture, it is stated, “One is forbidden to accept the guru, or spiritual master, as an ordinary human being (guruṇu nara-matiṁ).... A spiritually advanced person who acts with authority, as the spiritual master, speaks as the Supreme Personality of Godhead dictates from within” (Caitanya-caritamṛta Antya 5.71-74).

On the nature of the guru, himself, Thomas Forsthoefel and Cynthia Humes add their line of reasoning in *Gurus in America*, “The guru is the adept, the skilled one, the preceptor, the saint, the destroyer of karma, the embodiment of god. And, on occasion, the guru appears to be a “confounder” too . . .” (3)... And, “Despite the inherent conservatism of Bhaktivedanta’s theology, he nonetheless cultivated radical innovations in the interface between Hinduism and America[n culture], namely, the

ongoing use of English in services, the valuation of woman's spirituality and leadership, and the possibility for non-Indians to be Brahmins" (10). This is demonstrated in Srila Prabhupada's strong socialist teachings, advocacy of women's rights, and stance against classism. These underlying views are another reason for the strong influence he had on American youth who felt disenfranchised within their own culture.

I have found no scholarly, non-Vaiṣṇavan sources that discuss what constitutes the stature of true gurus. There are certainly many naysayers (non-Hindus) who believe all gurus are problematic. One such individual is Geoffrey D. Falk, an individual who, apparently, had a negative experience with following a guru, and felt impelled to write a book called *Stripping the Gurus*. This rambling 500-page manifesto is a personalized assault on all Eastern gurus, Western gurus, priests, reverends, and rabbis. The book is stocked with rampant name-calling, assumptions of fact, stereotyping, and little, if any, scholarly philosophy. Unfortunately, the book (which he gives away for free), is one man's opinion, but he has lots of sympathetic followers. It is also unfortunate that, while many of the people mentioned in his book should be included as false gurus, many should not.

In his book, Falk faults Srila Prabhupada for the wrongdoing of some of his disciples after his passing. Falk writes, "Details...to the alleged horrendous goings-on within the Hare Krishna community, including wide-spread claims of child sexual abuse, drug dealing and weapons stockpiling, have long existed..." (62). Interestingly, the source he uses is that of another guru naysayer, Sushi Das, a now Australian citizen of Indian descent who has made a career of distancing herself from her Hindu heritage and their customs.

In a nutshell, a true guru, as authorized by scripture and the parampara, is a devoted disciple of the Lord with the best interest of his own disciples at heart – and the primary best interest is leading his disciple back home to God. Now that true gurus have been discussed, let us take a look into the workings of false gurus and the potentially tragic results of following them.

Chapter Three

To demonstrate the workings of the false home-grown western guru as indicated by John Heron's model, I have chosen Jim Jones as the most seriously flawed westerner who tried to model his spiritual community (commune) after the successful Indian *ashrams* (spiritual communities) which were propagated by successful gurus like Swami Vivekananda and A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami in the United States.

Falling Down and the Damaging Fallout – False Gurus

I do truly believe that no false guru begins with this designation but falls down that path due to the inability to quell material desires. His initial desire is filled with good intentions, but if he is “only” a man, he will fail. A non-Indian, like Jim Jones, who was not raised in the life of Sanatana Dharma, and thus had no real knowledge of the dedication and incredibly strong constitution of a true guru, is doomed to failure when trying to imitate Sanatana Dharma. In Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma is a term used to denote the “eternal” or absolute set of duties or religiously ordained practices incumbent upon all Hindus, regardless of class, caste, or sect.

Jim Jones-the Anatomy of a False Guru

In his early endeavors, it appears Jim Jones had the best of intentions on helping people and becoming a successful leader. His humble beginnings in Indianapolis,

Indiana, were promising. He started attending Indiana University and eventually graduated from Butler University. Butler University was initially established by followers of the Disciples of Christ Church, although it was at no time managed by the church. It is no surprise that Jones was soon after ordained by the Disciples of Christ.

The first time his name shows up in the historical record is in the archives of *The Indianapolis Star* in 1953. He was then a 22 year-old student pastor from the Somerset Methodist Church assisting orphans at the Marion County Children's Guardian Home. He was described as "dynamic," arranging picnics and baseball games for the children, as well as driving them to his church for services. In a weird 1954 the newspaper article, Jones was reportedly involved with the importation of monkeys. According to the story, he had been selling monkeys from India and South America as a church fundraiser. The article depicted a photo of Jones playing with two of the baby monkeys (INDYSTAR).

After his association with a number of churches in the Indianapolis area, Jones decided to found his own Indianapolis church, called The Peoples Temple, in 1955. His choice to use the word "Temple" in the naming of the church is curious. In the U. S., at this time, temples were thought of mostly as Jewish, Latter Day Saints, and a small number of eastern sects (i.e., Hindu and Buddhist religions). "Temple" used in the name of a Christian church sounds a bit unfamiliar.

In the first years of his Peoples Temple, Jones traversed the realm of relative from donations made to his church by members and beyond, providing a steady stream of nourishing food and suitable clothing to hundreds of needy people. He even went further by helping those people find jobs in order to be productive and to give them a sense of pride. Jones was becoming a true pillar of the community, helping people of all races and

providing a true model of diversity within his flock – a rare situation during that era. “In 1961, Indianapolis Mayor Charles Boswell appointed Jones to be director of the city's Human Rights Commission, which had been created to address racial problems in Indianapolis. Boswell later said Jones helped pressure certain store owners and theater managers to be more welcoming of black customers” (INDYSTAR). He and his spouse, Marceline, even formed a family of all races through adoption, eight kids in all.

Then, a short time later, a noticeable shift occurred in the Peoples Temple regarding Jones himself. Jones’ method of teaching and behavior became messiah-oriented; for example, Jones began preaching his own word as gospel rather than the gospel of the Bible. Some members of the church began to sense the work of a charlatan and left, while others hung on every word and became impassioned devotees to Jones himself, considering him to be a modern messiah. “Whatever may have been in Jones’ heart at the beginning of his ministry had been replaced by something that he knew was a lie” (INDYSTAR).

Jones’s assessment of Jesus Christ as *the* messiah no longer translated in a word for word scriptural scrutiny of the New Testament. He was no longer wholeheartedly optimistic in the Biblical commentary of the works of Jesus. He began to insert his own cryptic meanings into the scriptures. For example, Kristian Klippenstein in *Jones on Jesus* writes, “On one occasion, Jones criticized Jesus for his potentially selective saving deeds. While Jones had the power and the will to save his followers from prison or hell, Jesus: ‘supposedly went down to hell, according to the epistles, and preached to who? The spirit[s] of the disobedient ones in the days of Noah...He took them outta hell! Well,

if he took some bunch of disobedient folk outta hell [but] wouldn't take you out then he's a dirty rascal'" (Klippenstein 40) (Q 1059, part 1).

It is interesting to note the term "rascal" in Jones' sermon. This is a term famously used by Srila Prabhupada in nearly all of his teachings about false preachers and false gurus alike. It a term used frequently by Hindus to denote a charlatan or imposter – the term "rascal" in the American vernacular is most commonly used to denote a mischief maker, a joker, or a prankster – nothing as serious as a false preacher. In Great Britain the term is used to denote a rogue, scalawag, or reprobate. It seems the further East the word travels the more serious its connotation or inference. So, where did Jones pick this term up? Could it be he was becoming an interested aspirant in Eastern thought, or possibly even an observer of Srila Prabhupada's successful movement?

In *Ethics and the Modern Guru – The Peoples Temple Edition*, published in 2016, authors David Parker Wise, Laura Johnson Kohl, Rebecca Moore, Kathryn Barbour, Benjamin Zablocki, and Steven Van Neste consider Jim Jones to be a modern-day guru. The book itself includes the extensive reportage on the 1978 collapse in Guyana of the Jonestown Peoples Temple Agricultural Project, a ghastly historic consequence of a violent and arduous cult, Jonestown, through its modern-day, sadistic guru, The Reverend Jim Jones. Jones amassed huge monetary and membership assets from a little church in Indiana to a loftier socialist organization in Guyana, outside the jurisdiction of any government body with no oversight. Would it be over-reach to conclude that these reports indicate the actions of a false guru?

No, say psychiatrist Anthony Storr in his book, *Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus*, "Jones perfectly illustrates the difficulty in defining the borderlines between conviction,

delusion, confidence trickery, and psychosis. Perhaps more than any guru with whom I am concerned...Jones was a confidence trickster" (11). He goes on to say, "Gurus like Koresh and Jones harangued their disciples into submission, submerging them in a flood of words" (Storr 221).

The Jim Jones Peoples Temple legacy is one of mass suicide, murder, sexual and physical abuse, and corruption at the hands of a man who thought he was greater than Jesus Christ, the messiah, all while betraying his followers' trust and his responsibility of being a true spiritual leader, as indicated in the four damning and official historical textual statements below:

"On November 18, 1978, 918 Americans died in Peoples Temple-related incidents, including 909 members of the Temple, led by Jim Jones, in Jonestown, Guyana" (Forward).

"The dead included 276 children. A tape of the Temple's final meeting in a Jonestown pavilion contains repeated discussions of the group committing 'revolutionary suicide', including reference to people taking the poison and the vats to be used" (Jonestown).

"Jones's feelings toward the Bible are perhaps best summed up by a statement he made during a Los Angeles sermon concerning his claim to be the reincarnation of Jesus and various Judeo-Christian...figures. Jones said, 'Yes, I'll become Jesus Christ. Yes, I'll become Moses'" (Klippenstein 46) (Q 1057, part 5).

Furthermore, Jones begged his congregation, "How many, through the anointing, have I raised from the dead in this room? How many have been healed of blindness...How many have I healed of rheumatoid or arthritic crippling conditions?

How many have I healed of cancer, the incurable disease” (Q 987)? In their final moments, what were the Jones disciples’ thoughts of the man they chose to follow for their salvation? “Jones and Koresh, to all except their disciples, appear to have been evil madmen. Fortunately, the majority of gurus are not as bad as they were” (Storr 19).

To be clear, did Jones ever say, “I am a guru?” No, but he did consider himself to be Jesus, messiah, savior, and even God himself:

What you need to believe in is what you can see... If you see me as your friend, I'll be your friend. If you see me as your father, I'll be your father, for those of you that don't have a father... If you see me as your savior, I'll be your savior. If you see me as your God, I'll be your God—Jim Jones. (Jonestown)

He even referred himself the Buddha, according to a Jonestown survivor:

There's a passage in the Bible where Jesus tells people to leave their families and follow him. Jim quoted that quite a lot. He said he was Gandhi, Buddha, Lenin -- he said he was the coming back of anybody you'd ever want to come back. And we believed him -- Teri Buford O'Shea, Jonestown survivor. (Gritz 1)

Finding research literature on true gurus was challenging, as much more material is available on those gurus gone bad – and not a lot of information on the true and good guru surfaced. It appears that scandal sells. Broadly debated, “gurus” are exemplified by other faiths; indeed, the Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad were true gurus. Most of the

reliable information on true gurus is found in the scriptures. For example, in the King James version of the Christian Bible, identification of true and false prophets is mentioned in Matthew 7:15 during Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This verse begins the section warning against false prophets:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's
clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Then the simple truth follows:

By their deeds you shall know them. (Matthew
7:16)

Yes, by their deeds. Again, Storr writes, of the good, or true guru, "Yet there have been gurus whose holiness, lack of personal ambition, and integrity are beyond question. Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha were gurus who are still venerated and whose teachings have changed the lives of millions of people" (Storr xi). Additionally, can one envision Jones, encircled by his "children," as he preached, taught, and instructed his hundreds of followers as they sat by his feet? Dr. Jan Peter Schouten, a theologian and sociologist, states in his book *Jesus as Guru*, "The image of Jesus that emerges from...Gospel texts is primarily that of Jesus as the teacher of wisdom: the reader constantly encounters a Jesus who gives instruction. The parallel with the Hindu guru who instructed a circle of students in true insight and the proper way of life is obvious"

(22). So, by inference and logic, it can be deduced that Jones, was indeed, a guru, albeit a bad one. In other words, Jim Jones passes the Duck Test of abductive reasoning:

“If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck” – Walter Reuther

But how; how was Jones able to accomplish this? One word comes to mind – charisma, or charismatic authority. Sociologist Max Weber defines charismatic authority as "resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber 215). In other word, charisma is an attribute of an individual's personality that is considered exceptional, and followers may consider this characteristic to be bestowed with supernatural, superhuman, or extraordinary powers or virtues. Whether such powers truly exist or not is extraneous – the fact that followers trust that such powers exist is vital.

Of note, in criticizing the many gurus Storr considers “bad” in *Feet of Clay*, there is no mention of Srila Prabhupada being on this list. However, it is true that Srila Prabhupada is, indeed, a charismatic personality. In India, the people call it all-attractive, especially in spiritual conversation – the guru is all-attractive as God's representative, just as Sri Sri Radha-Kṛṣṇa are all-attractive as God.

However, as always, it appears that Srila Prabhupada had the more pragmatic view of the spiritual leaders of any religion, whether they be Christian, Muslim, Jewish,

or Hindu – it does not matter. If the spiritual leader is speaking on God’s behalf, he is a guru. If this guru convinces people to love God, *that is the test*. The guru never claims to be God. True gurus only try to get people to become devotees of God and has no other business. (Prabhupada).

Unlike Jones, true preachers and gurus do not pamper themselves in self-promotion or self-deification because there is no selfishness within. There is a huge distinction among those who are truly considered gurus and masters as depicted in theosophical literature and the wannabes who indulge in self-aggrandizement, like Jones. “Personal worship, self-glorification, telling other people what to do, making them dependent, teaching them beliefs, imposing ideas on them, collecting money and becoming rich, having swimming-pools and private airplanes—all this is accepted as part of present-day Guru-dom but it is entirely incompatible with being a true spiritual Teacher or Master” (Bunier 3). So, what are the signs one needs to look out for to avoid becoming a victim of a fraud?

Signs of a False Guru

Because putting faith in a guru is such a significant commitment, following a false guru can be spiritually fatal. Many followers encounter spiritual drowning because of their devotion to adulterated gurus who then exploit the trust given to them. To be distinct, a false guru makes claims to be a true spiritual master but, in reality, possesses no genuine spirituality at all. In reality, they are con artists or showmen, and have the potential to be extremely dangerous to the true seeker. They may be abusive or just trying

to scam people out of money, while providing nothing in return but disillusioned ex-devotees. These fake gurus are just deluding themselves, and hurting the image of true gurus (Kazlev 1).

Additionally, complete unconditional sincerity while listening to the small pure voice of your own luminosity within is the best method of establishing if a guru is genuine. If there is something that makes you feel uncomfortable, anything at all, leave! However, it may take a number of encounters before any deceit is discerned. Now, knowing the signs of a true guru as taught in the sastras as discussed in Chapter Two – True Gurus, some negative signs of false gurus, like Jim Jones, can be concluded by juxtaposition. The signs of Jim Jones' negative character and practices can be realized by his own destructive behaviors:

- requesting monetary donations
- claims of instantaneous enlightenment
- sexual advances
- drug abuse
- untruthfulness
- false claims
- gurus residing in grandiose surroundings, and/or commanding large gifts from their disciples to sustain lavish lifestyles
- psychologically controlling their disciples' statements that, in the slightest way, makes one feel apprehensive (question all) (Wunrow 1).

True gurus do not deem themselves to be gurus. Real gurus perceive no differentiation amongst other souls and themselves; they do not render a boundary concerning the tutored and the tutor:

A Guru cannot make another see what his eyes are not capable of seeking. No true Guru will pretend to do it or want to do it. But a Wise One can be helpful if the disciple is receptive. It has been said that when the gods want to punish man, they listen to his prayers. Most people's wants are foolish. A person may want a Guru to do something for him but it may not be to his spiritual benefit. (Bunier 4)

Whenever trouble befalls a person, generally they want freedom from the pain and difficulty, but all things that arrive as a consequence of Karma carry with them a valuable object lesson.

Annie Besant was a British socialist, theosophist, women's rights activist, writer and orator and supporter of Irish and Indian self-rule. In 1893, shortly after becoming a participant of the Theosophical Society, she travelled to India for the first time.

Knowledgeable of the Indian belief in Karma, and due to a personal close examination of her life, Annie Besant indicated her belief in Karma when she was reported to have said that, while she would freely let go of the pleasurable experiences, she would never be inclined to relinquish any one of the struggles, because they carried with them valuable life lessons due to the burning off of negative Karma in this life (Jayawardena 62).

"Karma brings us ever back to rebirth, binds us to the wheel of births and deaths. Good Karma drags us back as relentlessly as bad, and the chain which is wrought out of our virtues holds as firmly and as closely as that forged from our vices" (Besant 1). Spiritual masters might not, consequently, impart the type of relief that an individual may perhaps desire. Their method of facilitating could come from an entirely disparate viewpoint. It

must be remembered, however, that a true guru is unable to help a man or woman who is not prepared to accept a guru's service, and it is only once the disciple is so inclined that the guru appears, as is stated in the scriptures.

Jim Jones might have been a man deeply in need of a true guru himself rather than taking on the role of one. Once again, his initial intentions might have been grounded in what he felt was his ability to lead, but spiritually he was weak; with disastrous results, and numerous victims in his wake. Make no mistake: although the mass suicide occurred in Guyana, far from U. S. shores, it is an American tragedy.

By this point, you might be asking – where are they now? Did the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement survive, or did it fade away? In the next chapter, I give answers this question.

Chapter Four

Many people ask me, are the Hare Kṛṣṇas still around? Did they just fade away?

A Defunct Movement?

The answer is veritably a resounding no!; to the chagrin of many detractors of the past, the movement is still alive. Although not quite as visible as they used to be, except in big cities, sometimes out of sight, and more private, is probably the best policy within the United States. Although tolerance is a Hare Kṛṣṇa strong suit, intolerance, unfortunately, will always be alive and well in this country – it's the national pastime. The movement remains strong and relatively constant in the United States, and in other parts of the world the movement is blooming – a look into any recent *Back to Godhead Magazine* will demonstrate ISKCON's successes. For example, a 2006 *Newsweek* article reported that ISKCON owns 400 temples worldwide with over 1 million members; 100,000 of which reside in the U.S. – over four times the number which existed 1980s (1). In another article, written a decade later in 2016, *Hare Krishna in the US Turns 50*, Kimberly Winston writes that academics of religion estimate 100,000 disciples still reside and worship in the United States, and a Governing Body Commission (GBC) of 29 men and women run ISKCON's temples from different countries throughout the world (1). A more in-depth tally of the number of ISKCON disciples practicing today was investigated, but these numbers appear to be closely guarded by the movement; even as a disciple, I was unable to locate or access them. Notable, however, is the fact, that, in the past ten years, the membership within ISKCON has remained steady with an increase in

membership four times larger than it was in the eighties as recorded in 2006. I would say this is a sign of a healthy movement.

It is true that after the passing of A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, his beloved ISKCON movement suffered major setbacks. Srila Prabhupada would have been heartbroken to learn that some unscrupulous teachers in the *gurukulas* were physically and sexually abusing children. Burke E. Rochford, Jr. states that these children were also psychologically abused and that it was, indeed, a tragedy toward ISKCON's children, its schools, and its reputation (74). While this was seriously addressed by ISKCON once discovered, and today there are safeguards in place by their Child Protective Office established in 1998, it would leave an indelible mark on the movement as well as victims in its wake. As a result, in January 2002, ISKCON's Association for the Protection of Vaishnava Children was created in order to generate awareness and provide support to claims of child abuse (Rochford 74). The APVC ascertains the relationship (role) of a suspected offender within ISKCON and whether he or she can continue in that role. It guides and supports all temples, schools, and projects in ascertaining and understanding their local laws concerning child abuse and reporting directives.

Unbelievably, there were incidents of gun running, moonshining, and even a murder conspiracy at ISKCON's flagship farm community, New Vrindaban, in Moundsville, West Virginia, when a rogue guru took over New Vrindaban. In 1991, this guru, Bhaktipada, was tried and convicted of racketeering and mail fraud, however, in July 1993, his conviction was overturned when an appeals court determined that some key evidence introduced at trial may have prejudiced the jury. Almost, three years later,

in April 1996, Bhaktipada refused to accept a plea bargain offered by the government, and returned to court to face charges. In the middle of the second trial, he suddenly agreed to plead guilty to only one count of federal racketeering, but was subsequently given a twenty years sentence in a federal prison (Rochford 230). This “rascal” guru and his accomplice eventually served time in prison, but, once again, an indelible mark was left on the movement with victims in its wake.

Today, the New Vrindaban farm community has regained the good graces of ISKCON and is, once more, considered to be the flagship Srila Prabhupada envisioned. However, its mission has slightly changed. It has become, among Indian Hindus visiting the United States, one of the most sacred sites in America. Only a handful of American devotees now farm and run New Vrindaban for Indians engaging in a deeply spiritual experience. The main attraction is the incredibly beautiful Palace of Gold constructed in memory of Srila Prabhupada by and for his disciples. A large number of disciples now live and work in the immediate vicinity of Moundsville and New Vrindaban offers services daily. All special festival and feast days are continuously observed, including a weekly Sunday feast which is open to everyone who wishes to partake in a large variety of vegetarian dishes first offered to the Deities of New Vrindaban. This Sunday feast is also offered at every ISKCON Temple throughout the world to anyone regardless of race, religion, or creed.

One very important mission steadfastly remains at the New Vrindaban farm community . . . the cow rescue and protection program initiated by Srila Prabhupada. It is true that cows are sacred to all practicing Hindus, especially Vaiṣṇavas. Many people unfamiliar with Hinduism may have heard of the sacred cow but have no idea *why* the

cow is revered. It all has to do with Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastimes when He descends. Simply put, whenever Lord Kṛṣṇa descends, his entire spiritual entourage descends with Him, many in the form of calves and cows who assist Him in His form as a cowherd boy in sacred New Vrindaban, India:

In His childhood, the Almighty Lord was surrounded by cowherd boys and calves, and thus He traveled on the shore of the Yamunā River, through gardens densely covered with trees and filled with vibrations of chirping birds. (SB 3.2.27)

So, any disrespect or assault on a calf, or cow, could be an assault on a sacred devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, which would be considered a terrible sin, according to Srila Prabhupada's instruction.

Srila Prabhupada did attempt to prepare for the smooth transition of running ISKCON upon his passing. He assigned a worldwide Governing Body Commission (GBC) and, also, prior to his passing, Prabhupada assigned eleven [initiating, or Ritvik] gurus, making sure they were American disciples (Smith 272). It was important to Srila Prabhupada that he assign American sannyasins (priests) to these roles because he began his movement in the U. S. and these American disciples were his oldest and most trusted devotees of Kṛṣṇa. However, there were many power plays by these eleven *Ritvik* (initiating) gurus that Srila Prabhupada put into place to initiate disciples and the Governing Body Commission he established to run ISKCON. These pretty much continue to this day and have caused a political rift within the movement:

As leaders...began offering Prabhupada initiation, they reconsidered the prevailing “ritvik” terminology. As one leader stated in an interview, ‘It is a term that has been badly used and mislabeled. We should say rather than we are using Prabhupada’s system of initiation. It is Prabhupada’s ISKCON, and we are going to use Prabhupada’s system of initiation. Drop the terminology of ritvik because it is a political trap.’ (Rochford 245)

So the problem is this: the name has changed but the politics continue. A clear separation of powers is needed, but a clear line of demarcation has yet to be established between the authority of the GBC and the initiating gurus, who are all powerful, well established sannyasin (priests), with many faithful disciples. However, on a positive note, this rift produced a system of checks and balances on exclusive power, i.e. not just one individual shall wield it – there will ever be only one Srila Prabhupada with the wisdom to run ISKCON in its entirety. Even so, the movement continues to grow slightly throughout the United States and even more so around the globe, building spectacular new temples and attracting devotees worldwide in a more than impressive pace. These openings and statistics are reported bi-monthly in every full color *Back to Godhead Magazine*, the official ISKCON journal of the Hare Kṛṣṇas.

Healing Through the Pain

Yes, the Hare Krsna Movement is not immune to the bad behavior of a number of its leaders that have caused pain and suffering for some of its disciples. In his book, *Hare Krishna Transformed* E. Burke Rochford offers his opinion of the direction ISKCON has taken as well as their health in the current American climate:

The goal of community development spawned the growth of a number of grassroots initiatives by devotees throughout North America. Collectively, they produced a number of community resources to serve the psychological, social, and family needs of devotees. Given the “need for healing,” counseling and therapy services have proliferated throughout the movement, aided by the substantial number of devotees who have gone back to school to gain professional training and credentials. (Rochford 212-213)

So the movement lives on, as it has for thousands of years. The devotees of Kṛṣṇa will continue to love and serve the Lord, and His gurus, as they continue to preach “as it is,” and has been, for millennia.

Conclusion

To conclude, in chapter one we traveled through my first experiences with ISKCON and my very positive experience of following a guru, a very special Spiritual Master who changed the direction of my life and, in reality, actually saved my life (another story for another time).

The second chapter examined the signs of a true guru as indicated in scripture and through discipic succession. Another chapter of the signs of a false guru, and the Jim Jones heartbreaking tragedy, followed.

And, lastly, in chapter four, we learned that ISKCON is not perfect, but they are striving to be... as devotees believe, only God is perfect. That's why They (Sri-Sri Radha-Kṛṣṇa) are God as One, the feminine and masculine positive energies working together to protect devotees from falling into *maya* (illusion). This is one of the major tenants of the Hare Kṛṣṇa faith.

Srila Prabhupada, ISKCON's founder, persistently stressed and demonstrated what he termed "plain living and high thinking." He emphasized that spiritual life was a science verifiable through reason and logic, not a case of ordinary sentimentality or blind faith.

"Who is Srila Prabhupada?," people regularly inquired, and it is continuously a tough query to resolve. For Srila Prabhupada will forever outshine traditional titles. On different occasions, people have called him a scholar, a philosopher, a cultural ambassador, a prolific author, a religious leader, a spiritual teacher, a social critic, and a holy man (*sadhu*). In truth, he was every one of these designations and beyond. Indeed, nobody could have ever mistaken him for the contemporary commercial "gurus" who

arrive in the West with slickly marketed, diluted adaptations of Eastern spirituality in order to satiate our craving for instantaneous wellness and manipulate our well-recorded spiritual gullibility. Srila Prabhupada was, more accurately, a true *sadhu* – a saintly man of profound intelligence and spiritual compassion. He had an innate apprehension and kindheartedness for humanity which, to such a considerable extent, requires true spiritual width and breadth:

The guru occasions the immediacy of the religious experience of the devotee. For the faith-filled devotee, he [*sic*] is the center of mystery. The sacred center of Hindu life is the living guru...his followers experience him as the restorer of the *dharma* order. ...The guru is the center of sacredness. In his company the scriptures, idols and even liberation paths pale in importance. ... The guru is the context wherein an individual gathers spiritual resources in order to encounter mystery; likewise, the guru is mystery itself in the faith experience of some devotees. (Cenkner 186-87)

One of the Dalai Lama's *Instructions for Life* in the new millennium is to “Take into account that great love and great achievements involve great risk” (Van Deurzen 66). During his pilgrimage to the ISKCON temple in Bangalore, India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama venerated Srila Prabhupada by proffering a mala of roses to his murti (sculptured form). Srila Prabhupada matchlessly instituted Vedic culture and spirituality all over the globe: in America, Europe, Africa, the Middle and Far East, Australia, and even Russia. Srila Prabhupada's risk-taking is what attracted disciples toward him, and provided naissance to ISKCON as a worldwide cultural society. Some say he “walked through

fire” to inaugurate this spiritual society of like-minded souls . . . *all* Prabhupada’s disciples agree that no one shouldered grander risks for God than he. “He was joyfully sober, thorough, and never gambled with his spiritual life. We can’t be sure what will happen to the world - economic collapse, nuclear war, floods, earthquakes, global warming. But one thing is certain: the soul will survive” (Mukunda). And one other truth is very real for Kṛṣṇa’s devotees: we are not alone in our day to day existence, and never will be.

Glossary

acarya: guru and head of a religious institution

Back to Godhead: magazine started by ISKCON'S founder in India that continues to be published and distributed worldwide

Bhagavad Gita: philosophical treatise forming an episode of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharata, in which Krishna introduces *bhakti-yoga*, or salvation through surrender to Krishna

bhakta: a devotee who practices bhakti-yoga

bhakti-yoga: a devotional form of Hinduism practiced by ISKCON members

darshan (darsana): visual contemplation of the deity

dasa (das): male servant

dasi: female servant

dharma: duty of rendering service to God (Krishna)

dhoti: strip of cloth worn by men on the lower portion of the body

diksa initiation: first initiation

disciple: one who has taken initiation from a guru

GBC: Governing Body Commission

guru: a spiritual teacher or guide who initiates disciples in the tradition's teachings and practices

gurukula: school established by a guru

Hare Krishna (Hare Kṛṣṇa): the first two words of the mahamantra for which ISKCON has come to be known

Hare Krishna movement: also known as the Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

harinama-diksa: first initiation

ISKCON: The International Society of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness

Janmastami: Krishna's birthday

japa: chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra on prayer beads for personal spiritual benefit

karma: the effect of one's actions, good or bad, that determine the place and condition in which one is reborn

kirtans (kirtanas): congregational singing and chanting, usually with musical accompaniment

Mahabharata: Hindu epic and a basis for much of India's popular religion

mahamantra: the Hare Krishna mantra and core religious practice of ISKCON

members: Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare

mantra: a word or group of words, such as Hare Krishna, considered to have transcendental power

New Vrindaban: ISKCON community in West Virginia

prasadam: vegetarian food sanctified by being offered to Krishna

Ramayana: one of two great Hindu epics, concerns the deeds of Rama

ritvik-guru: ceremonial priest

Ritvik movement: followers believe that Prabhupada remains ISKCON'S initiating guru after his death and that his guru successors initiate on his behalf in their role as ritvik-gurus

sampradaya: religious tradition

samsara: the repeated cycle of birth and death

sankirtan: preaching, chanting in public, and book distribution

sannyasi: one who has totally renounced society and its material attachments

Sanskrit: an Indo-European classical language of India and a liturgical language of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism

sastra (shastra): sacred teaching or scripture

sastric: scriptural source

siksa guru: instructing guru

Srimad Bhagavatam: composed by Vyasadeva and considered by most Vaiṣṇavas as their primary scriptural source

Vaiṣṇava: a worshipper of Vishnu (Krishna)

zonal acarya system: a system that emerged after Prabhupada's death that gave new ISKCON gurus spiritual and political authority over individual zones or territory

Note: *I made the effort to personally write this glossary based on the knowledge of my faith due to my practice; what I have been taught by my gurus; and the more than 100 books I have read in the past 14 years. I am unable to put a finger upon the exact time, place, person, or book from which I gained this knowledge, but most of which I know I can find in the voluminous life-time work by Monier Monier-Williams' A Sanskrit-English Dictionary.*

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Objective

A career as a professional Technical Communicator

Education

2017 Master of Liberal Studies, IUSB

2014 Bachelor of Arts, IUK

2012 Associate of Arts, Ivy Tech

Award

Ivy Tech Community College Kokomo

Outstanding Student of the Year 2012

Positions Held

Customer Services Representative

United States Postal Service

1. Wideband Communications Specialist

2. Allied Trades Specialist

3. Security/Law Enforcement Specialist

SSGT (E-5) United States Air Force

Publications

“Ramblings from the Heart of an Old Bard,” Book, 2014

505 W 3rd Street

Peru, IN 46970

Phone: 765-438-6586